PARENT AND EDUCATION ENGAGEMENT PARTNERSHIP PROJECT

A DISCUSSION PAPER

R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd.

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PREFACE

The opinions presented in the Parent and Education Engagement Partnership Project Discussion Paper have been developed from research completed by the Consultant, and should not be interpreted as reflecting the views of the BC Ministry of Education.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The research reflects the need to enhance Aboriginal parent engagement in, and satisfaction with, BC's public school system.

Numerous studies have detailed the significant disparity between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal parent engagement in BC schools.

During the past several years, numerous studies have identified significant differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal parent involvement in, and satisfaction with, BC's public education system. Parent and public opinion surveys conducted at the district level by the Consultant and other researchers have identified numerous communication-related issues regarding school-Aboriginal parent engagement, including:

- limited engagement of school staff with Aboriginal parents in activities such as Parent Advisory Committees and extra-curricular activities;
- teacher and Aboriginal parent dissatisfaction with school-parent communications;
- lack of teacher and administrator awareness and understanding of Aboriginal culture; and,
- distrust and antipathy expressed by Aboriginal parents of the public school system in their region.

The *Discussion Paper* includes options, policies and strategies that can be implemented by schools, school districts and/or Aboriginal communities.

Recognizing the importance and necessity of enhancing Aboriginal parent engagement in the public school system, the Aboriginal Education Enhancement Branch and the Student Assessment and Program Evaluation Branch of the Ministry of Education commissioned a major research project designed to identify and develop strategies that could be used by schools and Aboriginal communities to improve the level of Aboriginal parent involvement in local schools and school districts. This discussion paper can be viewed as an instrument to provide a common direction for all parties in order to enhance Aboriginal parent participation in BC schools. This discussion paper is intended to outline possible actions and/or initiatives that could be undertaken by all partner agencies to help ensure that BC schools become more open and welcoming to Aboriginal parents and families, specifically, and Aboriginal communities in general.

Research suggests that in BC schools activities that specifically target school-Aboriginal parent communication are limited.

Research completed as part of this study suggests that while there are some initiatives underway in BC schools to enhance school-Aboriginal parent engagement many districts have no specific strategies in place that explicitly target improving Aboriginal parent involvement in school and/or district activities.

This is further supported by the study *Overrepresentation of Aboriginal Students Reported with Behaviour Disorders* produced by the Ministry in April 2001, which indicates that parent involvement was mainly administrative. This *Discussion Paper* offers directions for enhancing such communication and dialogue in BC's education system.

The findings detailed in this paper reflect a comprehensive research approach.

The findings in this *Discussion Paper* represent the synthesis of an extensive research process which included a comprehensive literature review, surveys of Aboriginal education coordinators from all regions of BC, visits to 7 districts and 24 schools, interviews with 69 administrators, teachers, Aboriginal staff and Aboriginal parents and focus groups with Aboriginal students and parents. Irrespective of their affiliation with the education system, almost all individuals contacted expressed a need for strategies that would help schools encourage and support Aboriginal parent involvement.

In addition to describing the state of school-parent dialogue, outlined in this paper are numerous recommendations to enhance such communication.

Outlined in this *Discussion Paper* is the current state of school/district initiatives of Aboriginal parent engagement in BC. In addition, various activities or initiatives being utilized in some BC schools that could be considered best practices are identified. The paper also contains a range of possible initiatives that could serve as a foundation for future programs that focus on enhancing the school system's ability to engage Aboriginal parents and develop partnerships.

Six key issues are examined in this *Discussion Paper*:

- State of Aboriginal Involvement/Interaction with BC's Public Schools
- Barriers to Aboriginal Parental Involvement
- Current Engagement Practices
- Best Practices
- Guiding Principles
- Strategies for Enhancing Aboriginal Parent Involvement in BC Schools

In addressing these issues, the *Discussion Paper* includes numerous recommendations or action items. While responsibility for some action items has been explicitly addressed, it remains

incumbent upon all partners – schools, school districts and the Aboriginal communities – to support the range of options that are available to enhance Aboriginal parent – school partnerships in BC's public education system.

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INTRODUCTION

The *Discussion Paper* reflects the desire to enhance the partnership between Aboriginal parents and BC public schools.

In recognition of the need to develop a comprehensive and coordinated strategy that would enhance BC schools' engagement with Aboriginal parents, the BC Ministry of Education (Aboriginal Education, Student Assessment and Program Evaluation) commissioned this research to define the current state of Aboriginal parent involvement in BC schools and identify a framework that could be utilized by schools, school districts and/or Aboriginal communities to enhance Aboriginal parental partnerships with BC's public school system.

Our research identifies issues associated with school-Aboriginal parent communications and possible strategies to overcome such issues.

To this end, the Ministry of Education contracted with R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. and Dr. Kenneth Whyte to complete the extensive research activities as well as develop this *Discussion Paper*. The mandate of this research was as follows:

- to review available research and literature to identify the current range of Aboriginal parent engagement or communication strategies (Canada, North America, International context);
- to consult with BC Aboriginal Education Coordinators to identify practices, strategies and best practices in BC school districts with respect to Aboriginal parent engagement;
- to identify barriers to Aboriginal parental engagement in BC schools; and,
- to develop possible strategies that could be implemented by schools, school districts and/or Aboriginal communities that would contribute to fostering of partnerships between Aboriginal parents and BC schools.

For the purposes of this study, the Aboriginal and education communities are defined as follows:

Aboriginal Community: refers to Indians, status and non-status, Métis and Inuit.

Education Community: includes communities that have an

interest in or responsibility for the school and its students, including education organizations and school districts.

The Research Process

Development of this *Discussion Paper* and the identified strategies was based on a comprehensive and extensive research consultation process. The various activities completed in developing this framework included:

- a review of past studies, strategies and initiatives that targeted school-Aboriginal parent communication and interaction (literature review – Canada, North America, international in scope);
- a mail-out/telephone survey of all Aboriginal Education Coordinators across British Columbia;
- extensive field work and site visits including visits to seven communities throughout the province;
- focus groups with Aboriginal students and parents; and,
- policy Round Table held in Vancouver to review and discuss preliminary key findings.

As highlighted in Table 1 below, multiple approaches were incorporated in the research process to help ensure the validity of the obtained information.

Table 1
Research Activities Completed

Activity	Number	Purpose/Objective(s)
Literature Review	43	- More than 40 documents, initiatives, strategies and/or research papers were reviewed to identify effective strategies used to enhance Aboriginal parent-school partnerships in Canada, the US and internationally
Survey of Aboriginal Education Coordinators (Strategies Survey)	49	- BC Aboriginal Education Coordinators were asked to identify specific strategies or initiatives used to promote the engagement of Aboriginal parents in the education community - More than 80% of BC Aboriginal Education Coordinators responded to this survey
Site visits	7 communities 69 in-person interviews 24 schools visited	- Site visits were completed in a representative mix of districts (large, small, northern, rural and urban, etc.) - The purpose of the site visits were to identify best practices – to define what works and what does not work
Focus Groups	3 groups with 40 participants in total	- Focus groups were held with Aboriginal parents (2) and Aboriginal secondary students to identify barriers and strategies that could be used to enhance parental involvement in student education

Site visits included a representative mix of large and small districts, Northern, Southern and Interior districts, and urban and rural districts.

As part of this study, researchers visited the following communities:

- Prince Rupert
- Prince George
- Fort St. John
- Westbank (Kelowna)
- Castlegar/Trail
- Courtenay/Comox
- Surrey

In addition to the research obtained through site visits, the developed strategies were validated through a Round Table discussion held in Vancouver on May 31, 2002. This Round Table, attended by Ministry staff and members of the *Parent and Education Engagement Partnership Advisory Committee*, educators, administrators and Aboriginal parents, served to

provide feedback about the appropriateness of the preliminary findings and to discuss possible strategies.

More than 160 individuals provided input into the development of this *Discussion Paper*.

This document represents the synthesis of a considerable volume of information gained from literature/policy reviews, site visits, interviews, focus groups and a Round Table. The Consultant would like to thank the more than 160 individuals throughout BC who participated in this research process.

SECTION 1: ABORIGINAL PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN BC SCHOOLS: AN OVERVIEW

A key goal of the Ministry is to increase the school success of Aboriginal students and to increase Aboriginal communities' satisfaction with the public school system.

The Ministry of Education is responsible for the K-12 education system in British Columbia. The mission of the Ministry of Education is to provide leadership, support and focus to the K-12 education system in the province. The Aboriginal Education Enhancements Branch, Ministry of Education, has five goals, two of which are to improve the school success of Aboriginal students and to increase Aboriginal communities' satisfaction with the public school system.

Ministry policy requires school and school districts to involve Aboriginal parents, families and communities in consultations related to targeted funds and previously, participation in the accreditation process. School and school districts experience difficulty in meeting satisfactory levels of engagement in these areas. Aboriginal communities also experience difficulty in meeting satisfactory levels of engagement with the educational communities.

This research project is based on two assumptions:

1. Research supports that the engagement of parents, families and communities in children's education is key to student success.
2. When valid and effective partnerships between the education community and Aboriginal communities are established, and when these partnerships enable and assist Aboriginal parents to have greater engagement with their children's education and greater involvement in schools, then Aboriginal students will experience improved success in schools.

When parents take an active role in their child's education, there is a much higher probability of student success.

Current Aboriginal Parent Involvement in BC Schools

Research completed by the Consultant as part of this project as well as part of previous Aboriginal education studies highlights the considerable challenges facing many BC school districts in enhancing Aboriginal parental involvement in local schools. For example, as highlighted in Chart 1-1, of the 120 individuals

Less than one-half of key participants described Aboriginal parent-school communication as "good or positive."

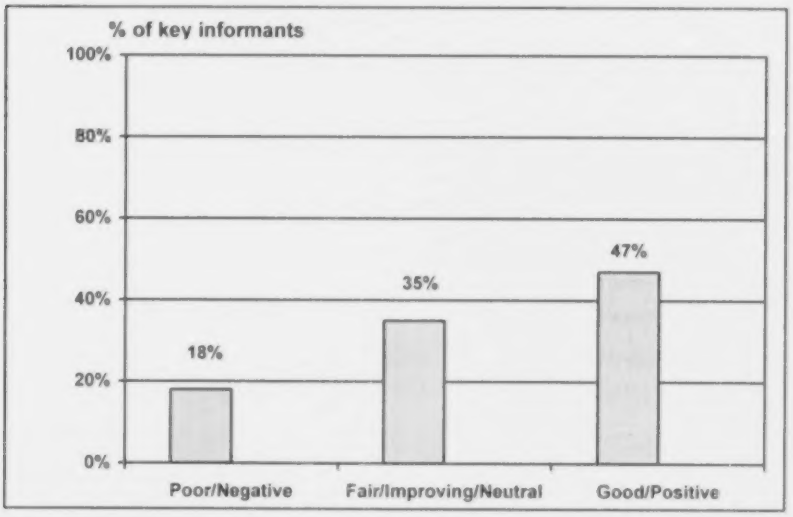
interviewed as part of this research, a significant proportion (18%) characterized the relationship between Aboriginal parents and the education system as "poor, negative or non-existent". In addition, one-third (35%) described the relationship as "fair". While 47% of such coordinators characterized the relationship as "good/very good or positive", many of these coordinators noted that there was still room for improvement.

It is important to realize that when a "western" style survey is presented to Aboriginal people the results must be carefully considered due to cultural differences. For example, the results of this survey may appear fairly positive, however, the reader must realize that Aboriginal people prefer to express positive responses; it would only be through a discussion that the reader would understand the nuances of the "positive" response.

Chart 1-1
Perceptions of Aboriginal Parent-Education System Relationship
Key Informant Interviews

n=120

Question: How would you describe the relationship between most Aboriginal parents and their school?



Several research studies confirm Aboriginal participation in school activities to be below that of non-Aboriginal parents.

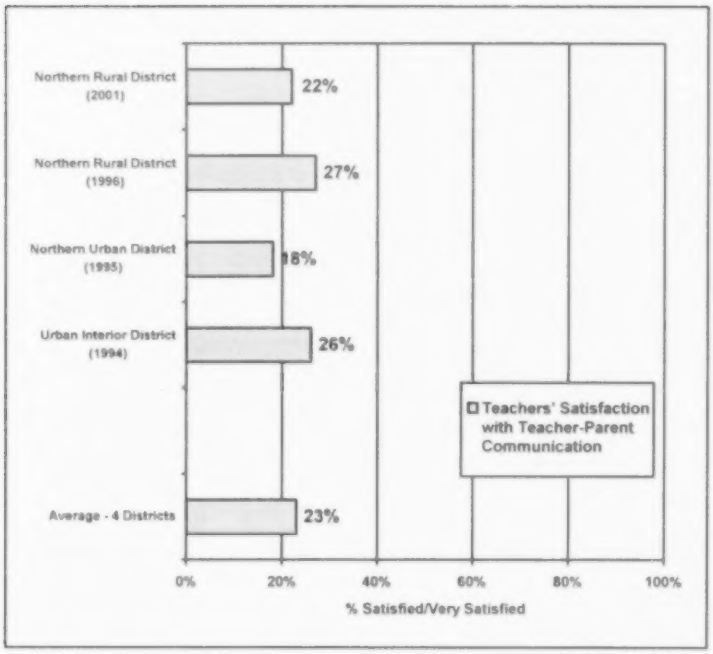
Previous research completed by the Consultant for numerous school districts across British Columbia indicates that there are considerable communication barriers between schools and Aboriginal parents, for example:

- in one district, Aboriginal parent participation in parent-teacher meetings was only two-thirds that of non-Aboriginal parents;
- the proportion of teachers who indicated that they were satisfied with the level of communication they had with Aboriginal parents was between 18% - 27% of staff in four districts in which such studies were completed (see Chart 1-2 below).

Less than one-quarter of BC teachers surveyed were satisfied with the level of communication they have with Aboriginal parents.

A key finding of the various research projects completed was the considerable gap in terms of existing school – Aboriginal parent communication. For example, as highlighted in Chart 1-2, among four school districts across British Columbia that studied school – Aboriginal parent communication over a seven-year period, less than one-quarter of teachers surveyed indicated that they were satisfied or very satisfied with their communication with Aboriginal parents.

Chart 1-2
Teacher Satisfaction with
Parent-Teacher Communication
Selected Districts
(1994-2001)



Question: Please indicate your level of satisfaction with the level of communication you have with Aboriginal parents?

"From the teachers and schools, our number one complaint is that parents don't show up on behalf of their child."

Aboriginal Education Liaison Officer

The inability of schools and Aboriginal parents and families to freely share information and communicate with each other is a major concern among both Aboriginal parents and families and educators. In focus group discussions, many Aboriginal parents noted that as they typically were contacted only to discuss problems about their child; they often associated communication with discussion of problems rather than the child's progress. In this context, Aboriginal parents were often reticent about teacher/school communication and were generally not comfortable engaging in communication/dialogue with school administrators and/or teachers.

In addition to issues associated with parent-teacher communication, it also appears that Aboriginal parents are not well represented on local school advisory councils. For example, very few of the 24 schools visited by the research team had an Aboriginal parent as a member of the Parent Advisory Council (PAC). Similarly, in past research completed by the Consultant, Aboriginal parents were found to be only one-half to two-thirds as likely to volunteer in their child's school as non-Aboriginal parents.

Encouraging Aboriginal parents to participate in school activities and decision-making represents a major challenge.

Actively promoting parent participation will require a change in the way schools/administrators and teachers interact and communicate with Aboriginal parents and families. Integral to such change is a greater understanding of the barriers faced by Aboriginal parents and families in becoming more comfortable with communication and interaction in BC schools.

SECTION 2: ISSUES ASSOCIATED WITH ENHANCING ABORIGINAL PARENT – SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

As part of the background research completed for this project, the research team identified several issues associated with enhancing Aboriginal parent – school partnerships. Information collected through literature reviews, focus groups and interviews with Aboriginal parents and staff provided an insight as to the various issues associated with increasing Aboriginal parent engagement in BC schools. The following were cited as major issues with respect to enhancing school – Aboriginal parent partnerships:

"Schools are not welcoming."

Aboriginal Education Coordinator

- Negative educational experiences of Aboriginal parents
- Barriers to Communication
- Lack of understanding by schools
- Cultural awareness
- Poverty and illness in Aboriginal families
- Lack of engagement strategies by schools
- The intimidation factor
- Negative nature of parental contact
- "Segregation" of Aboriginal students

"I don't think residential schools helped with very much, and I think there's a lot of baggage from that."

Teacher

Before identifying and expanding upon issues associated with enhancing Aboriginal parent – school partnerships it is important for the reader to take a moment to consider the traditional structure of the school system in relation to the dynamics of Aboriginal culture. When reviewing the following issues the reader should keep in mind that the schooling experiences of Aboriginal parents are very different from the Canadian population. As well, the school's expectation of parent engagement and an Aboriginal parent's view of engagement can be both traditionally and culturally very different.

"Administration doesn't take Aboriginal parents seriously and teachers speak condescendingly."

Administrator

Negative Educational Experiences of Aboriginal Parents

Many Aboriginal parents have had negative experiences with the education system during their childhood, and these experiences continue to impose on current perceptions. Some respondents cited being traumatized by their residential school experiences

"They have a lack of education and issues with literacy."

Aboriginal Education Coordinator

cited being traumatized by their residential school experiences, while others noted a general lack of trust with the system and those who administer and deliver education. In some cases, parents felt that teachers and administrators were prejudiced and racist. Many parents noted being ridiculed and mistreated by non-Aboriginal students and teachers during their school years. Aboriginal staff indicated that in some localities, racism is still a reality. All of these realities can result in Aboriginal parents finding it difficult to assist their children with homework and being uncomfortable volunteering in the classroom.

"All parents are concerned about their kids but don't know how to make changes or influence the schools.... They like to see changes but to do this they would need to bring advocates and interpreters to have their say."

Aboriginal Parent

Barriers To Communication

Numerous communication barriers were identified; many of these barriers relate the traditional structure of the school system in relation to the dynamics of Aboriginal culture.

For example, written communication is an expected form of communication in schools, however, face-to-face communication is the respected form of communication in an Aboriginal community. Often, schools will report that communication with Aboriginal parents is difficult because the parent's first language is not English, however, when communicating face to face often language barriers can be overcome due to the personal connection and understanding through body language.

Educators do not recognize or respect First Nations culture... and I do not understand why they won't respect us."

First Nations Parent

Further, educators and administrators often use school jargon that is not understood by parents of any cultural group. These discussions pervaded by language specific to education serve to further alienate parents from the school. Often schools do not make an effort to communicate using parent-friendly language.

Lack of Understanding by Schools

Many Aboriginal parents and families feel that there is a lack of understanding and empathy on the part of many educators as to difficulties experienced by, and challenges unique to, Aboriginal parents and families. This lack of understanding has led many Aboriginal parents and families to feel removed from the school process. Similarly, Aboriginal parents/partners noted that schools

need to be more aware of the local Aboriginal culture and become more familiar with Aboriginal issues. Schools needed to learn how to best communicate with Aboriginal parents and families.

"There have been no efforts to engage or make parents feel comfortable or acknowledge them as First Nations people."

Aboriginal Cultural Coordinator

Cultural Awareness

Many Aboriginal parents feel that teachers are not knowledgeable about Aboriginal culture, and that Aboriginal culture is not valued within the school system. When a school is knowledgeable about Aboriginal culture the staff will appreciate that their view of parent engagement may be very different to the view of the Aboriginal communities view. Schools will achieve successful partnerships when there is a common understanding of engagement.

In addition, many parents cited that the Aboriginal curriculum is under-utilized and perceived as unimportant to teachers and administrators. Furthermore, Aboriginal parents are less comfortable discussing their children with people they do not know and sometimes do not trust. There appears to be no recognition of, or compensation for, these differences by the school educators.

It was also noted that there is not one single Aboriginal culture, as the school Aboriginal population could include Aboriginal people from a variety of different cultures. Almost all partners noted while some excellent resources existed with respect to First Nations issues, considerably more material was needed, especially with respect to local Aboriginal culture/issues. Furthermore, teachers were often resistant to using available materials/modules. Other partners noted that the Aboriginal content was often dated and learning resources needed to be updated on a more regular basis.

Poverty and Illness in Aboriginal Families

A large number of people interviewed cited poverty as a barrier for parental involvement. Finding transportation and arranging babysitting for siblings prevented parents from attending school functions and meetings. This is particularly true for parents living in rural settings and in the North where public transportation is not available.

Poor health was also cited as a major reason for parents not being involved, as chronic health problems can prevent parents from attending school functions. Other issues, such as drug and alcohol abuse in families, also hinder contact.

Lack of Engagement Strategies by Schools

"Many parents are intimidated, have no education, and feel that teachers have 'all the power'."

Aboriginal Education Coordinator

Although teachers and administrators often felt they had made efforts to engage parents, the parents interviewed did not feel that most efforts were genuine. For example, events have been organized to promote Aboriginal culture without consultation or input from Aboriginal people. As a result, the content was inappropriate and the process was not respectful of Aboriginal culture. Many of the engagement strategies reported by schools were not actual strategies to engage Aboriginal parents and families. For example, the presence of Aboriginal support workers at the school was identified as a strategy, yet these positions, mandated by the school district, often do not receive the full support of the school in engaging parents.

At times, school meetings have been organized without sufficient time allotted for parents to feel comfortable in sharing personal information about their child or family.

The Intimidation Factor

"The only contact parents have with the school are when bad things are happening."

Aboriginal Education Coordinator

Schools have certain expectations of parents (e.g., assist with children's homework, attend school meetings, etc.). However, schools often have not made their expectations clear to the parents. Combined with lack of educational attainment and negative childhood experiences in the education system, parents often feel intimidated by school staff. In addition, many Aboriginal parents cited racial discrimination among school administrators and teachers, furthering the intimidating nature of interaction within the school setting.

Notwithstanding the considerable barriers faced by Aboriginal parents, partners noted that Aboriginal parents must become more involved in their child's education and not devolve such responsibility solely to schools. Similarly, it was noted that school processes are often seen as a barrier to parental involvement, and

schools should actively work to "demystify" these processes to enhance the comfort for Aboriginal parents and families to become partners in school activities. Schools need to visibly recognize Aboriginal culture within the school (e.g., displaying Aboriginal art) and through respectful interactions.

Negative Nature of Parental Contact

Teachers are required to contact parents of children who are having behavioral or academic difficulties. Unfortunately, often contact schools made with parents were through phone calls from teachers and/or administrators to discuss problems the child was experiencing, resulting in a lack of holistic contact. Contact when the child is experiencing success might, therefore, promote more positive feelings about the school and the child's education. Aboriginal parents and families have a right to a full reporting of their child's schooling in order to celebrate successes and to improve areas of weakness.

Although most respondents felt that the school should be responsible for initiating contact with parents, respondents also expressed that Aboriginal parents should assume an active role and be a visible presence in their child's education.

"Segregation" of Aboriginal Students

A number of Aboriginal parents and staff noted that the school system has often resulted in a "segregation" of Aboriginal students, as the proportion of Aboriginal students in learning assistance and/or special programs was much higher than that of the non-Aboriginal population. While Aboriginal parents acknowledged that such supports were often necessary, it was also noted that such programs should not become a catch-all for Aboriginal students who may be experiencing difficulties in a traditional classroom setting. Parents wanted their children to feel integrated in the classroom, and not identified as "special needs".

SECTION 3: CURRENT ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Based on the information collected through interviews, site visits and literature reviews, there are various activities occurring in BC schools designed to increase Aboriginal parental involvement in the education system. It should be noted, however, that many of the activities/strategies detailed below should not be considered new, as many of the initiatives were established in the early to mid 1990's.

Various strategies are being delivered in BC schools to enhance Aboriginal parent engagement in their child's education.

In general, these engagement strategies can be classified as follows:

- Governance strategies/initiatives
- Aboriginal support services
- School orientation activities
- Cultural awareness/culturally inclusive activities
- Other strategies

Detailed below is a brief description of the various engagement strategies.

1. Governance Strategies/Initiatives

Most districts had established an Aboriginal Education Committee to either guide and/or make decisions about Aboriginal education programs and services.

In most districts contacted, many of the coordinators noted that decisions on Aboriginal programs were either made by an Aboriginal Education Committee, or that the Aboriginal Education Committee provided advice on how Aboriginal programs should be structured and funded. Control of Aboriginal program decisions were seen as a positive development in that schools and the districts could develop programs and services that better meet the needs of the Aboriginal communities and Aboriginal parents and families. In many districts, the Aboriginal Education Committee was comprised of a mix of educators, Aboriginal staff and members of the Aboriginal communities (parents).

Other governance-related initiatives, although not found to be common across all districts, involved the promotion of Aboriginal parents as members of the Parent Advisory Committee (PAC) at the school level, and the fielding/support of Aboriginal parents to sit on the District Board of Trustees.

Overall, management of Aboriginal programs was seen as an important first step in ensuring that school programs and services were designed to meet the needs of the Aboriginal communities. While these governance structures in themselves were not seen as a way of increasing Aboriginal parent involvement in the schools, these structures facilitated the introduction and/or expansion of Aboriginal programs and services that specifically supported better school-parent communication.

Several districts formalized the partnership(s) between the Aboriginal communities and school system through the implementation of Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements and Local Education Agreements (LEAs). Such agreements were seen as a positive step in terms of ensuring that schools recognized their responsibilities to Aboriginal parents and families and the Aboriginal communities.

2. Aboriginal Support Services

There is an array of Aboriginal support services designed, in part, to enhance parent-school communication.

Almost all of the partners consulted cited the importance of Aboriginal support services in enhancing school-parent dialogue and engagement. It must be noted that it is not the sole responsibility of the Aboriginal Support Workers to enhance this communication; it is a responsibility of the whole school community. There is a wide range in the types of support services offered across BC but, in general, these services can be grouped as follows:

- home-school liaison activities;
- cultural/Aboriginal education support services; and,
- other support functions.

"Home visits have been very important, and more parents have been coming to the schools because of that."

First Nations Education Coordinator

Home School Liaison Activities

There are various Aboriginal support positions in BC school districts. These positions are typically described as:

- home-school liaison workers
- Aboriginal advocates
- First Nations support workers
- First Nations family resource workers

"... our Native Advocate does whatever it takes to help the student and the parent in the school."

School Administrator

In general, many of the support positions in BC schools have been in existence for several years and have been identified as critical to improving school-parent communication. While some support positions may include elements of both liaison and academic support activities, many districts have separate positions for academic support (i.e., First Nations/Aboriginal support workers) as compared to school-parent liaison activities (Aboriginal home-school liaison workers, Aboriginal advocates, etc.). Home-school liaison workers were identified as key individuals who help Aboriginal parents interpret the school system. Typical activities completed by home-school liaison workers include:

- contacting parents to attend school functions/activities;
- assisting parents in attending meetings/issues related to their children; and,
- promotion/co-ordination of cultural events in the schools (i.e., Aboriginal Days, cultural days, other) in which Aboriginal parents and families are invited to the school to participate in such activities.

"Teachers and principals need to be more aware of Aboriginal issues and recognize the cultural and historical back-ground of the Aboriginal community."

Aboriginal Parent

In some districts, establishment of Aboriginal advocate positions reflects the need to help parents understand, and where appropriate, challenge the education system to accommodate Aboriginal values and/or cultures. Such positions were established to help ensure that Aboriginal parents and families had a voice and support in their local schools. For more information on the Aboriginal advocate/support worker positions see *The Current Position of Aboriginal Support Workers in the BC Education System* submitted to the Ministry of Education by Mostly Salish Consulting Company and its Associates, March 2001.

Cultural/Aboriginal Education Support Services

In addition to the establishment of First Nation support positions, numerous districts have acknowledged the need to enhance school/teacher awareness of Aboriginal issues/Aboriginal culture. In effect, in addition to providing support to Aboriginal parents, districts have supported administrators/teachers by bridging the communication gap between schools and Aboriginal parents. Typical services provided include:

- developing local Aboriginal curriculum/resources for use by teachers;
- assisting teachers in terms of curriculum and communication targeting Aboriginal issues;
- providing professional development activities enhancing Aboriginal culture/awareness;
- providing academic support to Aboriginal students;
- working directly with student providing emotional support; and,
- working to support parents and families.

"...we try to bring new Aboriginal parents to the school one week before school starts."

School Administrator

In general, these services are directed at school administration/teachers to provide them with a greater understanding of Aboriginal issues so that teaching strategies become more appropriate for Aboriginal learners. While many of these services were designed to assist teachers in terms of curriculum and teaching styles, they often serve to enhance teacher-Aboriginal parent communication.

School Orientation Activities

Many school/district contacts expressed that they have several established processes/strategies specifically targeted at making the school environment more comfortable for Aboriginal parents and families. Typical activities included:

- an orientation day for new Aboriginal students and their parents one week prior to the commencement of classes;
- organization of "one-on-one" meetings with the parents, Aboriginal support staff and/or teacher early in the school year; and,
- creation of a parent handbook that plainly outlines school policies, programs, supports and expectations for parents.

"Parents are a key resource for the teaching of Aboriginal culture and customs in our schools."

Aboriginal Education Coordinator

Aboriginal coordinators noted that it was important to make personal contact with Aboriginal parents and families at the beginning of the school year so that parents would be comfortable in talking with all school staff, not just Aboriginal support workers or other Aboriginal staff.

Cultural Awareness/Culturally Inclusive Activities

District contacts frequently noted that many of their parent engagement strategies encourage the involvement of Aboriginal parents and families in schools, for example:

"Parents need a place in the school that they feel comfortable in...our Aboriginal room was designed for that purpose."

Native Advocate

- Participants in Aboriginal Culture/Traditional Activities
  Schools supported numerous cultural activities designed to encourage parent attendance/participation in the school, including:
  - school-band /dinners/meals;
  - Aboriginal culture days/activities;
  - parent-student sweat lodge activities ("Grad Sweats");
  - post-secondary night – opportunities for both students and parents; and,
  - "play" potlatches.
- Aboriginal Parents as Resources/Assistants
  Several schools noted that they had successfully engaged Aboriginal parents by utilizing their skills in the classroom. For example, Aboriginal parents provide instruction in Native arts/crafts in schools across the province. It is recognized that these are not the only skills that Aboriginal parents may bring to the school. Schools should be encouraged to work in partnership with the local communities to find out what other resources the parents may bring to the school environment. Aboriginal elders are also encouraged to visit schools on a weekly basis.
- Establishment of Aboriginal "Space" for Students/Parents
  Some schools/districts noted that they had designated "Aboriginal Rooms" for Aboriginal parents and/or students. Such spaces were designed to help ensure Aboriginal parents were comfortable visiting the school. When these spaces are made available, it is evident that parents come together and help coordinate and initiate meaningful activities within the schools. Typically, such spaces also represented the offices of the home school liaison and/or other Aboriginal support workers.

Despite efforts made to promote parent participation in school activities, few districts formally track such participation.

Other Strategies

Other strategies/activities identified by the partners as an effective means to enhance Aboriginal parent participation in school activities include:

- Use of the School as a Community Resource
  Several partners noted that promoting the school as a community resource (i.e., to be used for wedding receptions, dances, etc.) by the Aboriginal communities encouraged Aboriginal parents to visit the school and become more comfortable in the school environment.
- Accommodate/Deliver Seminars to Parents
  Some districts developed specific programs and services based on the input from parents. Examples included literacy programs (for parents and students), self-esteem workshops and/or recreational/extra-curricular activities in which Aboriginal parents would be more likely to volunteer and participate.

Measuring Success

Notwithstanding that schools/districts acknowledge the importance and necessity of increasing Aboriginal parent involvement in schools, it appears that few districts actually measure Aboriginal parent participation in school activities. In general, only a few districts indicated that they tracked Aboriginal participation through one or more of the following measures:

- percentage of Aboriginal parents on school PACs
- Aboriginal participation in parent-teacher meetings
- Aboriginal participation in extra-curricular events

It should be noted that in many districts, key performance measures focus on student outcomes such as student suspensions, transition rates, graduation rates, etc.

In the very few schools/districts that do track Aboriginal parent participation, examples include Aboriginal support staff noting Aboriginal parent participation at parent-teacher meetings, and established "targets" in securing such participation in extra-curricular and volunteer events. Other schools/districts noted that

they were tracking Aboriginal parent satisfaction via surveys or other means, for example phone calls, complaints to the school and/or Board office.

SECTION 4: BEST PRACTICES IN SCHOOL-ABORIGINAL COMMUNICATION

While a range of strategies across British Columbia were identified as having a positive impact on enhancing school-parent communication, it appears that there are several activities that could be considered as "best practices" in establishing effective strategies, programs or services, including:

- Engaging Parents in the Decision-Making Process
- "Communicate, Communicate, Communicate"
- "Think Outside of the [School] Box"
- Recognize and Address Barriers
- Aboriginal Role Models
- Other Best Practices

Engaging Parents in the Decision-Making Process

"The Aboriginal Education Council has signed an improvement agreement... this process brings together the community and the parents within the school system."

Aboriginal Education Council Member

Numerous district contacts expressed that a key element in the design of effective Aboriginal programs was the involvement of Aboriginal parents and Aboriginal communities in the decision-making process. For example, the First Nations Education Councils (or Aboriginal Education Committee) demonstrate to parents that they have the ability to influence and shape Aboriginal programs for students. Such councils have been the catalyst for a spectrum of initiatives designed to improve relationships between schools and Aboriginal parents.

In addition to creating a district framework to manage Aboriginal programs and services, it is essential that Aboriginal parents and families be viewed as "partners" in the education of Aboriginal students. In this context, many schools have made efforts to fully involve Aboriginal parents and families in school activities and school decision-making, as some schools have closely liaised with the local First Nations band(s) or Native Friendship Centre and Métis associations when designing new programs or policies. In addition, recognizing the legacy associated with the residential school system, several school districts have established Aboriginal Advocate positions to assist the Aboriginal communities in obtaining appropriate curriculum, and in securing extra-curricular

and administrative decisions/policies for a population that has been reticent in approaching and/or promoting Aboriginal issues in schools and/or districts.

"Communicate, Communicate, Communicate"

"We had a First Nations dinner with ice breakers and theme communication. Parents asked us to do it again."

Administrator

Almost all partners noted that engaging Aboriginal parents in school activities required considerable effort and persistence. Aboriginal parents and families quickly respond to effective communication strategies. Essential elements in effective communication strategies include the following:

- build trust with parents. Provide calls for good news and/or to inform parents about their child's progress and school activities. Positive contact might also serve as a connection on which to base interaction that is meaningful to Aboriginal parents and families: interaction that encourages dialogue and trust. Also, when teachers do not limit contact with parents to discussion of problems but, instead discuss the child's successes, the acknowledgement can strengthen relationships between all involved, the parents, the child and the school
- use multiple communication channels. It is important to utilize both verbal and written communication. Home visits were sometimes required to bridge the communication gap.
- provide opportunities for parents to meet in a social setting. Several schools/districts incorporated social activities (i.e., "play" potlatch, meals, refreshments, etc.) as part of parent-teacher meetings to encourage parents to attend. Other activities included recognition ceremonies for Aboriginal parents and students.

"Think Outside The [School] Box"

In many schools and districts, there is a recognition that building relationships with the Aboriginal communities will require innovative ways of delivering programs and services. Whereas in the past, parent-school communication was centred in the school, many schools now recognize that there is a need for, and benefit to, communication with parents outside of the traditional school setting. Examples of non-traditional communication/interaction include:

"We have a pow-wow and an Aboriginal dance club."

Administrator

- meeting with parents at the Band Office, community centre and/or Native Friendship Centre;
- attending Aboriginal events hosted in the Aboriginal communities; and,
- involving elders in communication and problem-solving.

In addition to participation in activities outside of the school, several partners noted that there was considerable scope for schools to incorporate Aboriginal practices when addressing school and parent issues. Examples include:

- use/incorporation of Aboriginal art/customs as part of the school design and daily activities;
- promotion of a wide range of extra-curricular activities including some that would be of particular interest to Aboriginal students and Aboriginal parents; and,
- use of traditional Aboriginal structures/practices to address student problems including motivation, discipline, bullying and/or other behavioral problems.

Recognize and Address Barriers

"All staff –both teachers and administrators- need to have a better understanding of Aboriginal issues."

Aboriginal Education Consultant

Virtually all of the partners contacted, including Aboriginal staff, school administrators, teachers and parents, noted that an effective engagement strategy required the support and commitment from all senior management levels and from the Board of Trustees to the principals, teachers and school office support staff. As noted in Section 2 of this *Discussion Paper*, it is essential that district programs and policies acknowledge the considerable barriers facing Aboriginal students and parents, then provide the programs/services by which to address and overcome such barriers.

Numerous partners cited the importance of providing Aboriginal awareness/cultural sensitivity in service activities to all staff, including both school/district administrators and instructional staff. Of particular importance was providing school staff a better understanding of the impact of the residential school system on current perceptions of education. Partners stated that it would be important to enhance administrators'/teachers' understanding of

Aboriginal culture, history and knowledge about current issues relevant to BC First Nations.

"There is a need to have more Aboriginal people in positions of authority and as teachers in our schools."

Aboriginal Education Coordinator

Aboriginal Role Models

A culturally inclusive workplace would incorporate a-of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff. Although many schools/districts have increased the numbers and proportion of Aboriginal staff in support positions, there is a dearth of Aboriginal staff in instructional and leadership roles. While most administrators expressed that they are actively seeking to recruit Aboriginal staff in instructional/administrative positions, administrators noted that there is a general shortage of qualified Aboriginal staff for such positions. The Ministry of Education is aware of this perception, however, it is known that there are qualified Aboriginal educators willing to fulfill these positions. School districts must be encouraged to actively recruit and retain these Aboriginal educators. The research for this project did identify that some districts are attempting to attract more Aboriginal staff through the promotion of the district as well as through the use of practicum placements.

"...it is important that Aboriginal parents see other Aboriginals actively involved in the school."

First Nations Support Worker

In addition to increasing the number of Aboriginal staff in schools, it was deemed important that Aboriginal parents be a strong presence as role models in the schools. Such presence could be made apparent through:

- the use of Aboriginal elders as school counsellors, teaching resources, etc.;
- meetings of the Aboriginal Education Committee held in local school(s); and,
- greater use of Aboriginal parents as teaching resources (both on a paid and voluntary basis).

Partners cited various best practices believed effective in their schools and/or districts.

Aboriginal Education Coordinator

Other Best Practices

Through the site visits and interview activities completed, numerous other best practices were suggested to increase Aboriginal parent participation in BC schools. While the focus of many of these best practices was on student issues (i.e., curriculum, teaching styles, etc.), there were several concepts

that were identified as being particularly successful in encouraging parental participation in schools, including:

- establishment of Aboriginal "parent clubs" in the school (e.g., cooking, reading, arts, culture);
- promotion of joint parent-student activities (i.e., parent-daughter participation in social events as part of International Women's Day events); and,
- utilization of incentives (e.g., door prizes, draws, etc.) to encourage Aboriginal parents to attend school functions.

"I don't think you can really design a single strategy. You can't take a cookie cutter approach in designing a provincial strategy."

Aboriginal Education Consultant

A key element in the design of best practices is the inclusion of the Aboriginal communities in the development of programs and policies. Aboriginal parents and families should be actively recruited in structuring school-parent communication programs. Several partners stated that parental engagement strategies should be tailored for each district. While there would likely be commonalties inherent in many strategies, each school and/or district strategy should reflect the concerns/issues unique to local Aboriginal community or communities.

SECTION 5: EXAMPLES OF UNSUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES

As part of the research project, the various partners were invited to discuss strategies which did not work or were judged to be ineffective in enhancing Aboriginal parent participation in school activities and/or educational decision-making. Detailed below are some examples of strategies that were identified as being unsuccessful by the partners contacted.

Meeting with No Reason

Many schools noted that meetings that were organized to provide an opportunity for Aboriginal parents and families to meet with school staff with no defined purpose and/or agenda were generally not well-attended, irrespective of whether or not they were held at the school or Band facility. Partners noted that Aboriginal attendance improved when meetings were co-ordinated with other activities (i.e., Aboriginal student honour ceremonies, school orientation activities, etc.).

Limited Duration Programs/Initiatives

Partners noted that because of the need to build trust with Aboriginal parents and families, programs should be designed to be implemented and maintained over an extended time period (three years was seen to be a minimum time frame). Partners stated that there was no "quick fix" and that programs of only a short duration (i.e., one year or less) did not generally achieve the anticipated outcomes or objectives.

"To increase parental involvement there must be a sustained effort."

Administrator

"Tokenism"

Some schools/districts reported that they attempted to have their PAC incorporate Aboriginal issues by setting aside one meeting to talk about Aboriginal issues and/or including an Aboriginal parent(s) on a one-time basis. In many instances, such activities were viewed as token gestures and did little to improve Aboriginal parent participation in school activities. More effective strategies involved inclusion of Aboriginal issues as a standing issue and/or the active recruitment of Aboriginal parents to become full members of the PAC.

"Bringing an Aboriginal parent to the occasional PAC meeting hasn't really worked well."

School Administrator

"Principals, vice-principals and teachers need to be plugged in as to what we are doing and why we are doing it."

First Nations Advocate

Insufficient Promotion of Strategies/Initiatives

Several Aboriginal Education coordinators noted that it was essential that special Aboriginal programs, services and/or functions be well-communicated to all school staff. As a key objective of many of these initiatives was to increase parent-school dialogue, teacher and administrator participation is important. In some instances, coordinators expressed that due to mis-communication and lack of understanding, Aboriginal events were seen to be "exclusive" (only for Aboriginals) and not "inclusive" (open to everyone).

"...it has to be remembered that our support workers are to support communication between parents and teachers, not to take over all communication between the school and home."

Aboriginal Education Consultant

It should be noted that many partners stated that while some strategies may work well in some schools/districts, these same strategies could be ineffective in other schools (even within the same district). However, almost all partners noted that schools/districts should attempt a pro-active approach. Where possible, inclusion of the broader Aboriginal communities in the development of school/district strategies was viewed as an important step in helping to ensure appropriate strategies/initiatives are implemented at the school and/or district level.

"Offloading" of Aboriginal Student/Parents to Resource Workers

The responsibility for Aboriginal students often falls to the responsibility of the resource worker or, as noted in Section 2, students are often streamlined into special programs; thus abdicating the responsibility of the school to Aboriginal or alternative programs. Many partners noted that some activities/policies had actually resulted in reduced communication between teachers and Aboriginal parents due to the "offloading" of responsibility to Aboriginal Support Workers. In some instances, it was noted that the role of the support workers should be to support and improve parent-teacher communication. However, in some instances when "Aboriginal issues" had become the responsibility of support staff, actual parent-teacher communication declined.

SECTION 6: GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Strategies need to be crafted with consideration for basic underlying principles. These principles have been extrapolated from the research literature and interviews with parents, teachers, administrators and Aboriginal Coordinators from across BC.

"The elements of a best practices strategy would include listening to leaders in the Aboriginal community as to what would work."

Administrator

Respect for Aboriginal culture is an essential element of an engagement strategy. By increasing knowledge about Aboriginal culture and practices, teachers and administrators are better able to facilitate effective communication with parents. Part of enhancing the cultural awareness of educators involves acquiring an understanding of the effect of historical events (e.g., residential school experience) on Aboriginal families. Gaining trust of the education system will require time, patience and persistence; all necessary ingredients to develop positive partner relationships between Aboriginal parents and the education community.

"'Open Doorway" concept – that parental input is welcome and that there is a special place for Aboriginal students and parents in the school."

Cultural Coordinator

When schools are welcoming and friendly Aboriginal parents are more likely to feel comfortable engaging with the school. Aboriginal culture needs to be respected and celebrated within the school. Visible signs of this include displays of Aboriginal art and inclusion of Aboriginal culture in curriculum content. Engagement initiatives require the commitment of teachers and administrators. Two-way communication is essential to building partner relationships, and personal contact between parents and school staff to facilitate relationship building (e.g., home visits). By being flexible school are able to encourage and accommodate input from the Aboriginal communities.

"Schools should create a sense of belonging and work on building trust."

Aboriginal Education Coordinator

Parents and school staff working cooperatively to develop strategies and programs based on principles of partnership builds strong relationships. Including the voice of Aboriginal parents and students in the development stage ensures that all parties "buy-in" to the strategy. Every Parent Advisory Council should have an Aboriginal voice to ensure that Aboriginal issues are considered.

It is also imperative that Aboriginal communities are encouraged to become partners in making decisions regarding Aboriginal

programs and services. The role and mandate of district Aboriginal education committees should be clearly defined. These committees work most effectively when allocated significant responsibility in the design and delivery of programs and services targeting Aboriginal learners and their parents.

Districts leadership is important in the support and development of engagement strategies the Aboriginal education council could be invited to participate in school board meetings. The district can also provide support funding initiatives and programs that promote Aboriginal parent engagement.

"We need to stop blaming the parents and vice versa. We all need to work together to build success."

Aboriginal Education Coordinator

Measurable targets allow implemented strategies to be assessed for their effectiveness. Assessment components, such as surveys, should be built into each initiative. Administrators could have evaluations based on their success in engaging Aboriginal parents. Performance targets could be set for Aboriginal involvement in school activities.

One strategy will not "fit all". Regional differences must be considered. For example, not all communities have band representation. In addition, all Aboriginal parents are not affiliated with bands (e.g., Métis). The particular needs of the local Aboriginal students and parents are best met when schools consider all their local Aboriginal communities in the development of strategies and programs. Gathering input from many community members results in appropriate and meaningful community partnerships.

Strategies to engage Aboriginal parents require administrators and teachers to develop partner relationships with Aboriginal parents based on mutual respect and trust. These guiding principles should provide the basis for establishing successful practices.

SECTION 7: POSSIBLE STRATEGIES AND ACTION ITEMS

In reviewing current initiatives, best practices and Aboriginal engagement strategies, it became clear that no single strategy could be identified as being an optimum or best strategy. However, review of the current initiatives that have been developed suggest that there is a set of common or core strategies that could be implemented to build partnerships between schools and Aboriginal parents. These strategies/action items are presented under the following headings:

- Needs Assessment/Parent Consultation
- Building Relationships
- Cultural and Awareness Strategies
- Measuring and Tracking Success of Partnerships
- Information Sharing

"Strategies need to be developed by Aboriginal parents, not developed for Aboriginal parents."

Aboriginal Education Coordinator

1. Needs Assessment/Parent Consultation

Engagement strategies need to reflect the needs and perceptions of Aboriginal parents at the grassroots level. While there are a number of initiatives/strategies that have been identified in this research as being successful, development and implementation of strategies require that Aboriginal parents must be part of the process. Examples of activities that could be completed by schools, districts and Aboriginal communities are detailed in Table 7-1:

Table 7-1
Needs Assessment/Parent Consultation
Action Items

Group	Action
Schools	♦ identify Aboriginal parents/school staff who will champion school-parent dialogue ♦ survey Aboriginal parents to identify how school-parent partnerships can be fostered ♦ include school-Aboriginal dialogue as part of school plan
Districts	♦ support Aboriginal Education Committee in terms of needs assessments ♦ establish evaluation criteria which incorporates Aboriginal parent partnerships as a criteria for success
Aboriginal Parents/ Community	♦ participate in needs assessments ♦ provide advocacy support/training/assistance to Aboriginal parents

2. Building Relationships

As noted in discussions with both Aboriginal parents and educators, establishing effective partnerships between Aboriginal parents and schools will require considerable investment in terms of both time and resources. There are, however, several activities that could be completed that would serve to build the relationship between Aboriginal parents and schools. These activities are identified in Table 7-2.

Table 7-2
Building Relationships
Action Items

Group	Action
Schools	♦ establish processes/activities to encourage Aboriginal parents to visit schools: - orientation meetings for new parents - establishment of parent clubs in the schools that are an integral part of the school environment, such as FNESC Parent Clubs - promotion of the school for cultural/social activities - creation of Aboriginal space in schools ♦ contact Aboriginal parents with positive feedback about their child
Districts	♦ review policies that govern school use for social/community events ♦ fund parent education/orientation activities
Aboriginal Parents/ Communities	♦ support/promote/develop programs/services that help educate Aboriginal parents as to their rights/ responsibilities in BC public schools ♦ work closely with schools to promote use of school facilities for social/other activities ♦ provide parents with evidence of the value of their participation to their child and educational success
Other BCCPAC	♦ work with school PAC's to strengthen Aboriginal representation in PAC's ♦ Aboriginal representation on school planning councils ♦ Incorporate Aboriginal parent views regarding school planning

"Schools need to be inclusive of Aboriginal culture. Aboriginal students and parents need to feel that their culture is valued in their school."

Aboriginal Support Worker

3. Cultural and Awareness Strategies

In site visits across British Columbia, the research team identified a wide range of activities that were being undertaken in BC schools to enhance school/staff awareness of Aboriginal issues. As highlighted in Table 7-3 below, there are numerous activities that could be completed at the school and district levels to promote greater cultural awareness among school/district staff.

Table 7-3
Cultural and Awareness Strategies
Action Items

Group	Action
Schools	• develop action plans/schedules that promote Aboriginal culture • identify Aboriginal resources to teach (paid/volunteer basis) and/or assist in cultural activities • have school staff attend on-reserve/Aboriginal community events (perhaps host events on reserve)
District	• provide funding/resources for the promotion of Aboriginal culture in schools - curriculum/resource development - resources for Elders/Aboriginal cultural staff — • examine policies with respect to off-school activities (participation in on-reserve activities/other) • a commitment to ensure that district leaders are educated to understand the issues that Aboriginal students experience on a daily basis in the school environment
Aboriginal Parents/ Community	• volunteer as teaching assistants for cultural activities • make available opportunities for school staff to visit Aboriginal communities - use of Band offices for parent-teacher interviews • develop an inventory of individuals (Elders, others) with skills/knowledge who could serve as learning/teaching resources

"...we have just started to track Aboriginal parent involvement in our schools – this will give us a better idea as to how well we are doing."

School Administrator

4. Measuring and Tracking Success of Partnerships

As part of this background research, it was noted that very few schools and/or districts explicitly acknowledged and/or recognized the importance of building partnerships between schools and the Aboriginal communities. While most schools/districts had established goals with respect to Aboriginal student outcomes (i.e., transition rates, graduation rates, other), very few schools or districts had developed frameworks that included Aboriginal parent partnerships as a key objective. Developing a framework that promotes and tracks Aboriginal parent engagement in BC schools is seen as an important step in building and managing school-Aboriginal parent partnerships.

Table 7-4
Measuring and Tracking Success of Partnerships
Action Items

Group	Action
Schools	• define key parent involvement indicators to be tracked • identify/establish processes for tracking such involvement • establish school-wide goals/targets with respect to parent participation
Districts	• define key parent involvement indicators to be tracked • identify/promote parent involvement outcomes - school plans/goals - administrator evaluations • report on district progress in meeting Aboriginal parent engagement outcomes
Aboriginal Parents/ Community	• participate in school/district discussions as to key parent engagement outcomes/indicators • emphasize the importance of Aboriginal parent participation in school/district events

"...we need to have a place to go where we can find out what works and what doesn't".

School Administrator

5. Information Sharing

In many schools and districts across British Columbia, educators, teachers and Aboriginal parents noted that they had little information on effective procedures in regards to school-Aboriginal parent partnership. Educators and administrators were supportive of processes that would expand their knowledge and awareness of best practices with respect to school-Aboriginal parent engagement strategies.

Table 7-5
Information Sharing
Action Items

Schools	• develop/maintain a log of best practices • identify barriers to Aboriginal parent involvement
Districts	• co-ordinate development of district best practices handbook • provide resources/support for conferences that include Aboriginal parent-school dialogue issues
BC Ministry of Education	• develop data warehouse for best practices in Aboriginal parent engagement strategies • strengthen use of electronic communications (website, listserve, bulletin board, other) • promote pilot project(s) at school/district levels to explore possible parent-school strategies

SECTION 8: SUMMARY

The results of this research suggest that there are a number of challenges associated with enhancing school-Aboriginal parent partnerships. Notwithstanding these challenges, it was made clear that all parties – schools, districts and the Aboriginal communities – consider the promotion of such partnerships as an important issue for enhancing Aboriginal student success. As such, this research represents an important first step in developing a school environment that is conducive to Aboriginal parent involvement and interaction.

As part of this research, the research team consulted with partners, including teachers, Aboriginal staff, administrators and parents from all regions of British Columbia. While the team identified a series of best practices that appeared to have resulted in fostering positive school-parent relationships, it was clear that the majority of schools and districts in BC do not have a specific strategy to enhance school-parent relationships. While this document identifies potential action items, it is essential that schools and districts develop their own strategies and action items that reflect the special needs and considerations of their respective Aboriginal communities.